Tugwell Assays JFK: He Missed Greatness

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A member of Franklin D. Roosevelt's "Brain Trust" says John F. Kennedy was a President with little power who made early mistakes of such magnitude that he cannot be ranked with the nation's great Chief Executives.

But had Kennedy lived, asserts Rexford G. Tugwell, Under-Secretary of Agricuture for FDR, "he might well have been one of the most distinguished and honored of the line."

"But he was not given time," Tugwell writes in an article in the June i ssue of Political Science Quarterly. "And because he made terrible early mistakes, it cannot be claimed for him that he belongs among the select few—with Jefferson, whom he admired so much, with Lincoln, with Wilson and with Roosevelt.

Tugkell called Kennedy "a most admirable individual," a man "touched with grace."

Yet, he writes, "he was a President who had little power because he had so small a majority and because he had so little influence as a legislative leader. He will be remembered, after some years, it may be guessed, for having participated in the disaster of the Bay of Pigs and for having faced down Khrushchev when the Russians attempted to establish a direct threat to American security in Cuba: One disaster and one triumph."

Tugwell, now with the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, said Kennedy's accomplishments suffer by comparison with those of his successor, Lyndon B. Johnson.

"But this is somehow not accepted as the criterion," he says.